

FORUM

Capitalism—

Organized Scarcity or Organized Abundance?

It is a Marxist commonplace that capitalism is a system of organized scarcity—i.e., one whose economic functioning inhibits the free use or the maximum use of the wealth resources socially available. While monopolies and trade associations with their price-and quota-fixing propensities may have distorted the capitalist anarchy of production, they have not essentially modified it. Anarchy of production leads, as we have seen, to an uneven rate of development in the various industrial sectors; when on a sufficiently large scale it brings about a crisis.

This unequal productive expansion, however, is in constant conflict with the basic mode of capitalism's existence—the self-expansion of capital. While the conflict does not always occasion crises it does account for the wasted resources, the duplication of function and that bugbear of capitalism, surplus or unused plant capacity. Profit expectation serves as a regulator of

the rate of capital accumulation. Thus, as was shown last month, there are phases of high as well as of low prices—this fact against the notion in F. Evans's *Nature of the Socialist Revolution* that some process (unexplained) continually depresses prices. Both serve as a measure of business activity and so of the rate of capital accumulation.

Evans holds that capitalism is organized abundance—organized by the mechanism of relative surplus value. It is this, he says, which brings about "the cheapening of products which is capitalism's specific mode of existence." The agencies for its realization, he contends, are capitalists "panting for profit" and "the competition of capitals." Increased productivity, we are told, is constantly reducing the value of labour-power, i.e., reducing the cost of articles necessary for its production and reproduction. On the other hand, the mass of use-values incorporated in it is at the same time constantly growing. Hence, Evans argues the workers' standard of living is ever rising. He agrees, however, that increased productivity involves increased intensity of effort. If that is so, then increased consumption may be a necessary condition for the replacement of the added wear and tear which the extra effort involves. If it is recognized that living standards entail a ratio of input to output, it may be questioned whether increased consumption and increased wages are synonymous terms.

Evans's views on relative surplus value raise implications which evidently he has not taken into account. Thus his assumption that relative surplus value generates not only ever-increasing wages but also ever-increasing profits means that there is an ever-accelerating rate of capital accumulation. The history of capitalist development refutes it. In actual fact capital accumulation is not any smooth continuous growth but, as Marx pointed out, bursts of business activity followed by more quiescent and even stagnant periods. It can also be pointed out that relative surplus value is, in everyday parlance, a method of reducing costs.

Whether a reduction in costs enables wages and profits to be increased depends, as was shown in *Notes on Crises*, upon other factors. It cannot be made an over-all assumption for the evolution of the entire capitalist economy. Again, the assumption of an equilibrium brought about by a nice adjustment of increased capital accumulation with an increased working population and an increased rate of surplus value, is evidence of complete ignorance of how the economy functions.

Of course, if capital accumulation proceeded in the manner indicated by Evans, an exhaustion of the available labour force would be brought about after a period. Before this happened, however, manpower would be in such short supply as to raise wages to the point which threatened the extinction of profits. Accumulation would then be rapidly choked off. Production would decline. Unemployment would appear and wages rapidly fall. In such a hypothetical situation, capitalism would be forced to do this to save it from self-extinction. There would ensue also a massacre of capital values, and any earlier productive gains would be wiped out. In a social organization where production is socially regulated and controlled, no such barriers would exist for the continued expansion of productive effort. Because of these barriers, capitalism must always be a system of organized scarcity.

Because relative surplus value (stripped of the grandiloquent language of Evans) is merely the attempt on the part of each concern to reduce its "labour costs," even though production may expand the net effect of all capitalists' action is, as the history of capitalism shows, to bring into being an industrial reserve army. Thus the tendency for wages to rise under the impulse of relative surplus value will bring a counter-tendency for them to fall. Without such regulating features of the upper and lower wage-level limits, profits could not be ensured and capital accumulation could not normally proceed. Evans's view of some

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self-developing, self-regulating mechanism which ensures ever-greater masses of use-values and consequently ever-greater markets with ever-greater wages and profits has more affinity with some paradise of *laissez-faire* "where all good capitalists go when they die."

Even from a purely theoretical view, an accelerated increase in the organic composition of capital would bring an accelerated decline in the rate of profit unless—and this is ruled out by definition—workers become productive supermen. From a practical standpoint, a demand for plant, factories, buildings, etc., on a scale appreciably less than that imagined by Evans—providing the supplies of manpower and wealth resources were available—would lead to rapidly rising prices and, for the buyers of those requisites, rapidly increasing costs. The profit margin between machine costs and labour costs would soon disappear. Evans, in order to prove his assertions of accelerated technical and productive progress would have to show steeply cumulative yearly increases in capital depreciation, which of course he cannot do. One can at least say for Evans that his views are never complicated by any evidence.

Again, the Productivity Council based on *Reports of the Working Parties* (1946) spoke of the lack of technical innovation and the chronic excessive capacity that had occurred in many important sectors of industry: a sure sign of technical stagnation and a rebuttal of Evans's view that capitalism is a system of continuous technical development. Some idea of the rate of expansion of plant capacity is given by Dr. Rostas in the *Economic Journal*. He shows that between 1925 and 1948 the average yearly increase in physical output per head was less than half per cent. Colin Clark, in the *Daily Telegraph* of 7th November, 1954, says that the rate of economic progress was greater in the last half of the nineteenth century than now. This makes hay of Evans's unsupported assertions of some absolute cumulative expansion of production. Finally, if there had occurred an ever-expanding production of the means of production—the indispensable basis for industrial growth—how explain the chronic surplus plant capacity for many decades in the coal, iron and steel and heavy engineering industries?

To revert to the question of ever-rising standards of living, one test would be to show that workers have secured the major share of production increases, i.e., that wages have risen during the course of capitalist development much faster than profits. Evans's views, of course, rule out the notion of wages being increased at the expense of profits. Nevertheless, even on this score any examination of profits and wages over the last fifty years yields no evidence. If, of course, Evans has any sources of information, for so wordy a writer he is strangely reticent about them.

In the real world of capitalism one cannot make valid generalizations as to some pro-

gressive, overall, technical law of development. Technical progress varies from industry to industry and this for long periods. Even discounting cyclic fluctuations, there are times when conditions are unfavourable for either. Even when conditions are favourable, increased wages do not fall like ripe plums into the workers' laps. They have to be sought, argued for and even fought for. Neither the humanitarian impulses of the employers nor any ineluctable process guarantees them. Indeed the phase of relative surplus value, as Evans has been told, was not the result of an abstract law of evolutionary processes but the concrete outcome of class conflict. Thus capital accumulation had brought about in many sectors, labour shortages. Workers, organized into ever-growing and more powerful trade unions, sought in those conditions to improve their standards. The capitalist answer to this was the extension of labour-saving machinery, which in time changed the process of absolute surplus value to relative surplus value. One of the drawbacks of an all-embracing theory of immanent progress is that it allows you to see everything and consequently nothing.

On the question of the competitive mechanisms of capitalism, what evidence is there that they are agencies which provide for an accelerated productive expansion? As H. N. Leyland has pointed out in *Trade Associations*, competition often not only fails to eliminate surplus plant capacity but brings about the very conditions for it. That highly competitive conditions lead to a price depression below the long-term norm is a fairly typical form of market behaviour. It can generally be said that such competitive market conditions will rule out technical innovations, even among the most efficient concerns. It also means that such competition does not reduce expenses but raises them because, due to excessive plant capacity, even the bigger firms become high cost producers.

What often happens in those circumstances is that agreements on quotas and prices are reached. Thus, the less efficient are preserved and the more efficient held back: technical development is again retarded. All of which suggests organized scarcity, not organized abundance.

Capitalists themselves no longer believe in the piratical practices of cut-throat competition. They much prefer, if and when they can get it, the comfortable life of agreed quotas and prices. It is true the very self-expansion of capital brings about evasion and termination of trade agreements, but the vigour and persistency that seek to renew them are proof that free competition is no longer regarded as an efficient instrument for the removal of that bugbear of capitalism, surplus capacity.

The war and its aftermath have changed the situation somewhat. The destruction and wearing-out of plant during the war have necessitated rebuilding and re-equipment of capital goods. Again, the large demand for consumption articles to make

good wartime deficits, plus the export drive, has lessened the incentive for restrictive practices. Nevertheless, as H. N. Leyland points out, trade associations are growing in number—there are about 2,500 of them now—and coverage. Indeed, there is little to prevent and plenty to support the view that surplus capacity is likely to become a problem once more.

On Evans's assumptions of expanding production and, of course, expanding markets, with the concomitant expanding profits, one cannot ask why the formidable and steady growth of monopolistic tendencies—only how, in such conditions, they could ever have appeared. Leak and Maizel's report on vertical and horizontal combinations (1944), based on the 1935 Production Census, while it cannot be summarized here, shows a 70 to 90 per cent. concentration in many sections of British industry.

No suggestion is made here that there is some inevitable monopolistic law which will leave the world under the control of a few industrial giants: an idea beloved of Communist theorists and pseudo-Marxists. Experience shows that monopolies are in constant process of being formed and breaking up, just as it can be shown that there are circumstances which favour them and circumstances which don't. For that reason it appears to me that Professor Sweezy's quite valuable contribution on monopolies in *The Theory of Capitalist Development* was somewhat overdrawn, just as was his notion that the monopolist is the world calculator of marginal profits and costs. It can be said of the laws of monopoly what the text-book said of snakes in Iceland—there are none.

Monopoly is something not absolute but relative; not a question of kind but degree. While it may be possible for them to control prices, they can do so only to an extent which will not encourage other powerful concerns to enter the field. Again, many monopolies are hedged round with powerful outside "interests," and examination shows that monopolistic dividends are not on average higher than non-monopolistic ones. There is also fierce competition between many monopolies. Because monopoly helps to breed monopoly, monopolistic sellers are often confronted with monopolistic buyers, and fierce competition is the result. Whatever may be said of monopolies—and a detailed examination is impossible here—they do not alter the characteristic pattern of capitalist production.

Again on the question of technical progress, many monopolies provide an impetus for technical innovation and research; on the other hand, many of them are restrictionist in this respect. That is because of their control of markets and productive substance, which makes them less susceptible to the shock of new techniques and innovations. Thus, they are under no compulsion to scrap plant before it is worn out. Such monopolies tend to slow down both the rate of capital accumulation and technical progress.

Undoubtedly the concentration of economic resources—which the 1948 White Paper on Monopoly regards as the normal development of existing society—has changed and is changing market behaviour based on free competition. Instead of price-cutting as a general practice (often retaliatory, wasteful and even ruinous), sales promotion and advertising technique are becoming the competitive form of existing society. The old adage “alike as peas” no longer holds. Certain proprietary brands set out to show that nothing could be more unlike peas—especially their peas which, they claim, are unique. By selling products and claiming for them intrinsic qualities, firms seek to attract custom from rival firms. This is known as imperfect competition.

This attempt to increase sales without recourse to price-cutting has led to an enormous growth in distribution costs. To give some idea of this, it was stated in 1938 consumers bought goods in England to the value of £2,800 million. Distribution charges were estimated to have cost over £1,000 million. In America, the proportional distribution costs are said to be greater. Such is the colossal misdirection of wealth resources peculiar to capitalist society. Add to this the vast growth of bureaucracy and expenditure on armies, navies, air forces, military needs, etc., and one realizes to what extent capitalism is a system of organized scarcity.

In exhorting workers to ever-increasing productivity, real anxiety is in that appeal—for unless increased productivity is maintained the vast unproductive agencies of modern society cannot exist. Even present living standards might fall dangerously back.

The fact that someone propounding a theory of progress should himself be so unaware of what actually is taking place is not without irony. Evans's struggle to use a Marxist tool of analysis to demonstrate his theory of progress, as I said on a different occasion, reminds one of a small child trying to use his grandfather's sword. One may add: what a pity that, when Evans set out to find socialism, he never discovered capitalism *en route*.

E.W.

E.W.'s. next article will deal with the reasons which, in his estimate, prevent capitalism from being a system of cumulative technical progress and organized abundance.

CORRECTIONS.

Last month's issue of *FORUM* was wrongly numbered; the May issue was No. 32, not 31.

In the article *Can War Hasten Socialism?* (April), a printing error gave Colin Clark's estimate of the average yearly productivity increase since World War II as 2½ per cent. This should have read: “little more than 1 per cent. per year.”

The Colour Question

We are working for a society which, as yet, exists only in the minds of a little over a thousand people. It may be true that the only definite thing we can tell people about this society is that it will be based on common ownership. They, however, insist on knowing more, just as we ourselves when dealing with people advocating a different kind of society insist on hearing more about it than a vague generalization. Do we not ask our opponents: Will there be wages? Will there be a coercive authority? We cannot demand of others what we are unwilling to give ourselves, so we must, as far as it is possible, work out theoretically the many facets of the future society. As always, of course, theories are only theories until they are proved correct or otherwise, by application. However, if we are to have a safety-line of consistency for action and propaganda we must continually try to perfect our theory and always check our original ideas to make sure there is no contradiction.

We could not agree that a majority of workers who accept the necessity for getting rid of private ownership, but still possess prejudices about race, could bring about Socialism as we visualize it. Or could we? We need not be so concerned about the slight disharmonies which may arise due to colour prejudice, but we must be concerned about the ideas of people who are assisting us to bring about that society. How important this is, could be seen recently at a meeting of workers who were discussing a strike resolution. The seconder, who seemed to agree with a lot of socialist ideas, ended his contribution by saying: “We are not niggers, we are white. Let us be treated as such.” That man, when giving an analysis of capitalism's wealth distribution, sounded no different from the socialist. But we could not agree to his being in the Party with such ideas about the supposed superiority of the white man. This is the reason for dealing with the possible problem of assimilation of different colour or cultural groups under Socialism.

The colour question in capitalist society can be described as the problem which arises when, due to simple prejudice or the clashing of different cultures, groups of people with different pigmentation are unable or unwilling to assimilate. Real assimilation would mean inter-marriage, equal status in social and working life, etc. I think it is true to say that for most people there is no colour question until there is a clash of economic interests, as in South Africa at the moment, or as when occasionally we hear of a row between a coloured landlord and white tenants in London. It is on those occasions that hidden prejudices viciously come into the open and, of course, hinder the possible solution of what is in reality an economic problem. Even though it is true that for most people the problem of race does not

concern them until it hits them economically (or appears to), in my view it is not just sufficient for the socialist to explain that what seem to be colour problems are usually economic problems, and that the elimination of economic conflict would mean less opportunity for the arousing of those horrible prejudices.

Let us assume that the people of the world had introduced economic equality by abolishing private ownership and calling into existence common ownership. While there would certainly not be economic conflict, there would possibly still be this problem of assimilation. It is pertinent to ask, of course, whether it matters if people of different coloured skins do not assimilate to the extent which I would like? It could be argued that the job of the socialist is to help to establish the economic basis for Socialism, and leave the problem of assimilation to those who wish to be assimilated. Perhaps under Socialism different peoples with different cultures will wish to retain the identity which their cultures give them, and not be drawn into a world culture. That there will be harmful conflicts due to colour and cultural prejudice is hardly to be doubted. Though those conflicts may not descend to the level of violence, that does not mean there cannot be a serious disruption of social harmony.

What kind of disruption? Exactly the same kind that we see so often under capitalism, for which there seems so often to be no economic explanation. Take, for example, the taboos which cover marriages between people of different coloured skins. I cannot find, in England at any rate, any economic clash which could be said to be the primary cause of the ugly expressions of disgust and loathing that such unions often bring forth. They are simply results of prejudice: the strange prejudice towards that which is different. Again, in the matter of housing or work there is a tendency for people to retain the barrier of colour by forming separate groups, even though there would seem to be no economic explanation for so doing. If these phenomena cannot be explained on strictly economic lines then there is no reason to think they would disappear or be of no consequence when economic equality had been established.

If we can accept the possibility of disharmonies of the kind I have mentioned, then it must be part of the socialist case that the people of the world must not only establish economic equality, but also be so divorced from prejudice on colour that assimilation will follow quite naturally.

FRANK DUNNE.

“Socialist propaganda and unpunctuality have been largely synonymous in this country. The S.P.G.B. will change that.”
(*The Socialist Standard*, June, 1905).

THE WORK OF LEWIS MUMFORD

Historical Materialism and Modern Times

(Part 2 : Conclusion)

Although Lewis Mumford has pointed out that a biological age (or "biotechnic complex," as he terms it) is developing, his concepts of biology appear at times to bear more resemblance to the idiosyncrasies of Saint Francis of Assissi, who was said to converse with animals and birds, than to modern science.

The experimental method of science has been very well summarized as follows:—

"All experiments boil down to two very simple operations: taking apart and putting together again; or, in scientific language, analysis and synthesis. Unless you can take a thing or a process to bits you can do nothing with it but observe it as an undivided whole. Unless you can put the pieces together again and make the whole thing work, there is no way of knowing whether you have introduced something new or left out something in your analysis."

(*Science and Society*, J. D. BERNAL).

In comparison, Lewis Mumford writes as follows:—

"No analysis of the parts and no mere addition of analyses and abstractions will ever give any insight into the pattern or purposive configuration that endows them with a special significance: indeed, this organic relationship will not even be suspected when methods of abstraction and isolation are the sole ones employed."

(*The Conduct of Life*).

Considering this comment in its context, I understand that he was pointing out the need for "ensemble theory." The point about the purposelessness of electrons, protons and other fundamental particles of physics, which could not explain human feelings such as love, hate and joy, was made in the nineteen-thirties by C. E. M. Joad, I think. However, it is somewhat "dated," because "ensemble theory," or the theory that shows the effect of arrangement of a number of bodies, has been developed somewhat since then. Research in the field of general statistics was made during World War II because of the use of such theories in the problems thrown up during the war. For an introduction to developments in group theory, statistics, information and communication theory, the reader is advised to consult such books as Wiener's *Cybernetics*.

However, treating the quotation as a general point, as S.R.P. did, what is its significance? Is it a way of saying that no real understanding of biological processes will ever be obtained? Does it mean that it is doomed forever to be a science of observation only? Place against this the achievements of the model organisms of Grey,

Walter and others, described in such books as *The Human Use of Human Beings* by Wiener and *Minds and Machines* by Sluckin. The fault is that when something—in this case society—is termed an organism, the analysis is considered to be complete. Nothing could be more wrong. We are lucky to-day to see cybernetics making great strides and explaining a number of features of organisms in an isolation process (how else can you experiment?) This is giving us knowledge of how biological organisms work, and will in the future cast more light on society as an organism. Already we can see the significance of loose couplings with feedback controls in the way the means of production brings the structure of society into line with it.

In understanding society we need to know more than the fact that it resembles an organism; we must understand how that organism develops. That is why we need a theory of history. We are not interested merely in what is or what has been, but wish to know *why* things have happened, and also how society will be in the future. Because he has not considered society in this analytical way, Lewis Mumford tends at times to muddle his classifications with his desires. He preaches as follows on mass production methods:—

"The fact that simple repetitive operations agree with the psychological constitution of the feebled-minded constitutes a warning as to the limits of sub-divided labour. Mass production under conditions which confirm these limits may exact too high a human price for its cheap products. What is not mechanical enough for a machine to perform may not be human enough for a living man. Efficiency must begin with the utilization of the whole man; and efforts to increase mechanical performance must cease when the balance of the whole man is threatened."

Those may sound very humane sentiments, but do they really come from his analysis of society? They do not. They constitute an example of his desires, not a description of the way twentieth-century society has been developing. What has happened is that more efficient and often less human processes have been developed in order to increase profits, while alongside this the social side of the factory has been developed to keep the worker happy, or at least content. Efficiency, as measured by productivity, has not been allowed to fall for any more human feelings, though it has been found that by treating workers in a more human way efficiency can be increased.

From these trends, one would be more justified in saying that work is becoming more specialized at all levels, and alongside this more time is spent on hobbies and other activities in which the personality and the whole man are developed. Perhaps we can see this more clearly in 1955 than was possible in 1932.

Mumford tends also to consider that any possible aspect of the Paleotechnic Phase was bad, and that the Neotechnic and Biotechnic Phases are good. He considers (page 214 of *Technics and Civilization*) that World War I was a setback for the good and developing Neotechnic Phase, presumably because poison gas was used; this is a miners' weapon, and mining is a typical paleotechnic occupation. Also biotechnics is even better than neotechnics, so presumably biological warfare based on modern bacteriology is much better than neotechnic-style war with hydrogen bombs, or paleotechnic war using modern nerve-gases!

This tendency to mix analysis with desires makes his method of classification much less objective than it could be. If anything was designed well in the nineteenth century, which is definitely in the paleotechnic phase, it is termed either eotechnic or neotechnic. An example is the clipper sailing ship, which has beautiful design—and is therefore termed eotechnic. While, in the twentieth century, if any process (such as the belt system) is developed by the use of electric power, and also appears to be harmful to human beings, it is termed quite arbitrarily "really" paleotechnic.

It is useful to notice that if the process of industrial innovation is studied dynamically, or as a developing process, such inconsistencies do not arise. The mechanical aspect of this was described by this writer (FORUM, March, 1953) as follows:—

"Productive processes have been simplified so that each man does simply a few manipulations, and then a device is constructed to perform these manipulations more systematically (because it is cheaper) needing man then only for maintenance and adjustment."

He went on in September, 1953 to show how the simplicities resulting from the use of electricity lead to a new attitude to industrial welfare or scientific management, because with the increased flexibility of factory design the human operator becomes more important. Considering it as a process developing in time is both clearer and more accurate.

It is worth noting also that, although Lewis Mumford considers that progress in other sciences will increase as they rely more on the study of natural or biological forms, robot or control devices were retarded somewhat in the initial stages by over-concentration on the human form as a model.

(Continued on page 142)

MARXISM and LITERATURE: 2

"He observed that stink, or stench, meant no more than a strong impression on the olfactory nerves; and might be applied to substances of the most opposite qualities; that in the Dutch language, *stinken* signified the most agreeable perfume, as well as the most fetid odour, as appears in Van Vloudel's translation of Horace, in that beautiful ode, *Quis multa gracilis*, &c. . . . that he had reason to believe the stercoraceous flavour, condemned by prejudice as a stink was, in fact, most agreeable to the organs of smelling."

Thus Smollett, in 1770, contended that beauty is a relative thing. So it is. The writings which delight one age are tosh to another: Lylly's *Euphues* and Sidney's *Arcadia*, acclaimed four centuries ago, are merely boring now. "Modern" poetry is unacceptable to those of us who were brought up on Tennyson, Newbolt and Gray's Elegy. Nor is it simply a question of what is acceptable—the whole purpose and manner of literature may vary from epoch to epoch. The writer of to-day who feels impelled to analyze and probe would have been, a few generations back, a marvellous storyteller instead. "Even the phantasmagoria in men's brains," wrote Marx and Engels, "are necessary supplements of their material life process, empirically demonstrable and bound up with material premises."

Beowulf is a bore—pedestrian, heavy and unlikely; in Anglo-Saxon England, it thrilled and inspired its hearers. The Romans left Britain, the pent-up migratory movement from Germany and the north began, and there were decades of struggle until the warlords formed the first English kingdoms, such as they were. The struggle produced barbarian epics, as in Greece: homespun textures of legend, passed on and enlarged by wandering gleemen and tale-tellers, until they were written down and Christianized in the monasteries in the eighth century A.D. Only a few fragments remain: *The Fight at Finnsburg*, *Waldere*, *The Battle of Maldon* and *Beowulf*.

Legends begin from facts—often, the facts of man's contest with the elements. Long before the great migration, the tribes on the coasts of northern Europe, struggling against the sea, formed the legend of Beowa, the god who overcame Grendel the sea-monster. When they escaped from the sea, the god became human. Thus, early in the sixth century a new hero was sung. Round about 520, the Geats from South Sweden

went plundering on the lower Rhine; there was a battle, and the Franks drove them away. After the battle, tales spread of a great fighting man—Beowulf, the nephew of Hygelac, king of the Geats. "Beowulf, the son of Ecgtheow, took the place of Beowa, the vanquisher of Grendel. . . . To this germ were gradually joined several appendages, derived partly from mythical, partly from historical sources, or from the analogy of related sagas" (B. Ten Brink, *Early English Literature*). Beowulf came to England as the warrior who slew dragons: he was Saint George's grandfather.

That is how legends always grow. There are three stages. First, the factual basis—often slender, sometimes guesswork, sometimes in circumstance rather than happening. Next, the addition of later, less accurate, less relevant records; and finally the "fabulous history" stage, when it has come to serve a specific social purpose (e.g., the demand for a national hero) and the legend is all that matters. Beowulf, King Arthur, Achilles and Cuchulainn are all of one family.

The Anglo-Saxon epics mirror the times in which they were made. The kingdoms were a matter of military protection, developed from the German war-bands which Tacitus described: there was, in short, a division of labour between the farmers and the fighters. The warlord's followers—his thegns—fought with him, developing the concept of personal rather than tribal loyalty; in return, he shared his spoils with them. Beowulf describes his service in youth to Hygelac:

"I repaid him in battle for the treasures which he gave me."

And, as Dorothy Whitelock points out in *The Beginnings of English Society*: "The richly furnished ship-burial at Sutton Hoo suggests that even the kings of heathen days had considerable wealth at their disposal."

The minstrel was the preacher of those times. His stories contained practical wisdom, law and justice; they drew rough morals, stirred and solaced men. They would be sung in the hall after the day's work, or by the fire after the day's hunting or fighting:

"....The thegn fulfilled his office,
He that bore in his hand the ale-mug
huge,
And adorned; he poured the pure,
sweet liquor.

Oftimes a singer sang, full merrily sang,
In Heorot's hall; there was joy of
heroes."

(*Beowulf*).

"In every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."

MARX.

There were two kinds of minstrels: the *scop*, who devised songs, and the gleeman, who merely repeated them. Often the chiefs themselves were singers, and sang as they led their men to battle. A *scop* could rely on a good living, either in a king's employment or travelling from place to place. *Widsith the Wanderer* and *The Lament of Dior* describe both sides of it; the first an account of his travels, the second with a familiar story—

"For many winters I held noble offices,
Had a kindly lord; till now Heorenda,
A man skilled in song-craft, receives
the land-right
That the protector of Earls gave me
long ago."

He had, in short, received the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of cards and coppers.

Christianity enhanced, not altered, the Saxon political structure; that is why it spread over England in a century. The social ideals of duty to overlords, protection of property and so on were reinforced by divine authority. Cnut's laws said: "For all that ever we do, through just loyalty to our lord, we do to our own greater advantage, for truly God will be gracious to him who is duly faithful to his lord." Some gleemen became priests, putting Bible stories into verse. There came into being, too, a class of monastic hack writers, whose job it was to set down the old epics with a Christian overlay.

The kings and the Church were history-conscious, because history makes propaganda for power. The seventh, eighth and ninth centuries produced innumerable religious and political surveys—lives of saints, priests and martyrs, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* (only the monasteries' concern for this sort of thing, in fact, has made them appear as "oases of learning" in the Dark Ages); Gildas's *Destruction and Conquest of Britain*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, Nennius's *History of the Britons*. Not that these were historical works in any modern sense. "Gildas," says his editor Williams, "would never have regarded himself as a 'historian'; he is a preacher, a revivalist who will 'attempt to state a few facts' by way of illustrating his message that divine anger must visit with punishment a sinning people and priesthood."

The unification of the southern English kingdoms under Alfred and the growth of trade drew attention to the question of language. The *Englisc* spoken by the fifth-century immigrants existed only in a number

of dialects, and the Danish invasion added to them (the monks wrote Latin, of course). The "revival of learning" promoted by Alfred was chiefly an attempt to make West Saxon the standard speech of England—successful insofar as most surviving pieces of early English are written in that dialect. Had it not been for the Norman conquest, "English would probably have developed much as the other Low German forms have developed, and we should now be speaking a language not unlike modern Dutch." L. Pearsall Smith, *The English Language*.

It is worth mentioning that the English of the tenth-century manuscripts, far from being crude, is full of complexities of gender, inflectional forms and so on: the precision of written language was produced by the lack of unified speech. The same sort of thing happened in China (Professor Shih-Hsiang Chen describes it in Unesco's *Interrelations of Cultures*). Spoken Chinese includes several different languages and dialects, but the written language is universal and is precision itself, with its ideographs corresponding to monosyllables. That is why Chinese education has always been emphatically literary, and why Chinese poetry for three centuries has aimed at perfection of verbal form above everything else.

Regrettably, in a survey of this kind whole literatures have to be left out. While the Anglo-Saxons, laying the foundations of feudalism, produced their hero-myths and poems and chronicles and moralities, Bagdad knew the legends and wags' tales that make up *The Thousand and One Nights*; Norse story-tellers were at work in Iceland and Moorish ones in Spain; Omar Khayyam was looking at the stars (never knowing how he would be misrepresented eight centuries later). And, because trade and armies moved, there was continually a gentle interchange of stories and knowledge—so that the legend of King Arthur, for example, went back and forward between Wales and Provence for centuries before it was written down.

The Normans superimposed their language as firmly as their feudalism. For a century and a half, French was the language of court and castle; for almost the same period, literature meant French poetry and Latin prose. Something new appeared—romantic love; not merely as a theme for courtly poems, but as a social concept. This is Engels' account of it:

"... Matrimony remained what it had been since the pairing marriage, a matter of convenience which was arranged by the parents. The first historical form of sexual love as passion, a passion recognized as natural to all human beings (at least if they belonged to the ruling classes), and as the highest form of the sexual impulse—and that is what constitutes its specific character—this first form of individual sexual love, the chivalrous love of the middle ages, was by no means conjugal. Quite the contrary. In its classic form among the Provencals, it heads straight for adultery, and the poets of love celebrated adultery. The flower of

Provencal love poetry are the Albas (*aubades*, songs of dawn). They describe in glowing colours how the knight lies in bed beside his love—the wife of another man—while outside stands the watchman who calls to him as soon as the first grey of dawn (*alba*) appears, so that he can get away unobserved; the parting scene then forms the climax of the poem." *(Origin of the Family)*.

The troubadors who sang these songs, like the old gleemen, were professionals in the sense that they lived by them; they carried honours, gifts and places in rich men's retinues. The idea of direct payment for a piece of writing had never arisen so far, however. That belonged apparently to the age of printing, essentially to the age of wages. Nevertheless, when the output of Romance stories was at its height, a half-literary profession appeared. People found prose easier to read, so clerks were commissioned to render poems and songs into everyday language. "It is recorded of a clerk named Birton," says Ford in *The March of Literature*, "that for one lord or another he thus as it were castrated upwards of ninety romances."

All this and much more comprised the literature of feudalism, and not much perception is needed to see that, from *Beowulf* on, it was aristocratic, concerned with war and love and upholding the military caste. The world might have been made up of warriors and knights and pretty young things, except that someone had to feed them. The common people did come in, however, in the priests' tales. For the purpose of teaching and preaching, stories were collected from every source and adapted to point morals in everyday affairs. Many of them were Eastern stories, diffused through Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac into French and thence into English; they represented husbands, peasants, merchants, priests themselves in all sorts of situations where a pious twist might be given—the effort sometimes must have been great. The priests' tales ultimately gave more to literature than all the court romances. The best-known collection is the fourteenth-century *Gesta Romanorum*—still being printed to-day; its jokes and fables provided authors' material everlasting. Boccaccio, Gower, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Schiller, Rossetti and ever so many more borrowed from it. There, at any rate, was a literature of and for everyday.

By the thirteen-twenties the beginnings of what is now called Middle English had appeared. Layamon's *Brut d'Angleterre* was the supposed story in verse of England "after the flood." Part west-country folklore, part drawn from the fabulous, epic-struck histories of Wace and Geoffrey of Monmouth, for the first time it presented the centuries' accumulation of legend—Lear and his daughters, Gorloduc, King Arthur. Other writings proved the influences of the time: the poetical debate *The Owl and the Nightingale*, for example, "reminding us that we are in an epoch when jurists and lawyers quickly rose to great influence,

wealth and position, a time when Bracton wrote his book on the laws and customs of England" (Ten Brink).

It is worth pausing over the case of King Arthur. If he lived at all, he was relatively a nobody; if he lived at all, he was never mentioned by contemporary writers. But the Druids of Gaul had a legend of Merlin, before the Romans came to Britain, and the Welsh a tale of a leader with a black flag, and the Breton followers of the Norman kings had heard of an Arthur in Sicily. A thousand and one conjectural stories were there to be added until, as England became a nation, national sentiment wanted a national hero. Thus, when Geoffrey and Layamon and Malory at last wrote it down, Arthur turned out to be, after all, only a personification of the upper-class ideals of the thirteenth century. As was observed earlier, that is how legends—and religions—are born.

R. COSTER.

The Work of Lewis Mumford

(Continued from page 140)

Having pointed out some of the limitations of Lewis Mumford's contribution, I must mention a few of the highlights. He gives a fine account of the relationship between mass production and warfare in *Technics and Civilization*. Also his account of time-keeping in the same book is excellent. The following is an interesting example:—

"The new bourgeoisie, in counting house and shop, reduced life to a careful, uninterrupted routine: so long for business; so long for dinner; so long for pleasure—all carefully measured out, as methodical as the sexual intercourse of Tristram Shandy's father, which coincided, symbolically, with the winding of the clock." *(Technics and Civilization)*.

His descriptions are not related to the distant past. On the twentieth century, for example, he points out that the camera is replacing the clock in some ways and this may well be the cause of "the change from an introspective to a behaviourist psychology."

The works of Lewis Mumford have shortcomings which this writer has been at pains to point out, because they contain so much that deserves serious study. However, he cannot conclude with saying that *Technics and Civilization* is a good book. It was not merely worthwhile to read it—it was a pleasure.

ROBERT.

Family crests on personal writing paper are seldom seen these days, and there are very few private cars whose doors are emblazoned with their owner's coat of arms. . . . The modern reluctance to do so may well be due to self-consciousness, or to an understandable dislike of appearing ostentatious.

Debrett's Peerage, 1955.

Outline-2



HUGH GAITSKELL, Labour politician of "planned economy" era. No working-class struggle: from Army-officer family, public school and Oxford. Studied and formed views under Robbins, Cole. First job with WEA, economics for Nottingham miners; moved up one year later to lectureship at London University. Spoke for Labour in the 1929 elections, adopted candidate (unsuccessful rival: Colin Clark) for Chatham at next election, 1932. Defeated, given South Leeds safe seat next time.

Wartime secretary to Dalton in Ministry of Economic Warfare. Re-elected 1945, followed Shinwell as Minister of Fuel and Power; was in on nationalization of the mines. Next rung: Chancellor of the Exchequer. "It was undoubtedly Gaitskell, together with Douglas Jay, who made up the Government's mind to devalue the pound." (*Picture Post*, 7th April, 1951).

Conclusion: Still concerned with economic warfare—on the other side from workers.

Cuttings

In an article in "Family Doctor," the British Medical Association's magazine, Dr. Roger Pilkington, the geneticist and anthropologist, says: "It is high time that all of us . . . realised that our colour prejudices have no foundation in fact." . . . Leading experts had declared that available scientific knowledge provided no basis for believing that the groups of mankind differed in their innate capacity for intellectual and emotional development. "Given the same opportunities of education and environment the performance and ability of individuals does not differ appreciably from one race to another." *Manchester Guardian*, 28/4/55.

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Every year increasing mechanisation at the coal-face means one per cent. less coal mined—or one per cent. more slack.

(Director of Public Relations,
National Coal Board).

The Observer, 1/5/55.

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It is essential to Communism to give all children an all-round education up to university standard.

Daily Worker, 16/4/55.

After completing seven years of school Russian boys may be compulsorily sent to trade or factory schools between the ages of 14 and 17 (girls between 15 and 16); pupils who carry on in professional secondary schools or the upper forms of general secondary schools are legally exempt, but otherwise the call-up to trade schools is at present quite arbitrary. . . . It is a criminal offence to run away from these schools (which are usually residential and may be at a considerable distance from the child's home) punishable by up to a year in a corrective labour colony.

Manchester Guardian, 20/4/55.

* * * * *

Lady Pakenham defended the habit of keeping up with the Joneses—"a thoroughly nice family"—when she addressed the Advertising Association at Brighton yesterday. . . . "Is it a good thing to take notice of other people's standards? Is it not just a case of keeping up with the Joneses? To me 'keeping up with the Joneses' is a much maligned social habit. The ordinary housewife means two things by 'a higher standard'—keeping up with the Joneses, and passing them." *Manchester Guardian*, 7/5/55.

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The sharp expansion in profits and the increased dividends of the Unilever group reported this morning are a reflection of the consumer boom. Value of turnover for 1954 increased to the record figure of £1,437,429,000, compared with £1,310,121,000 for 1953. Combined trading profit increased by nearly 14 per cent. to £70,095,000 and the net profit, after tax, from £25,799,000 to £31,854,000, including £2,667,000 exceptional items and non-

recurring profits. Unilever Ltd. is paying a final dividend of 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent., making 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. *Manchester Guardian*, 14/4/55.

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Hundreds of Glasgow school-children, aged between 14 and 17, took a "decision for Christ" in front of Mr. Billy Graham, the American evangelist, at a crusade meeting yesterday. Nearly ten thousand children had been released from school by the education authorities to attend a special service in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow.

Manchester Guardian, 28/4/55.

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The recent confusion over Japan's foreign policies has been cleared by a blunt statement from the Prime Minister, Mr. Hatoyama. . . . Japan has now returned its attention, after this statement on foreign policy, to the pressing matter of what the immediate future holds for an impoverished nation and what can be done about it.

The Cabinet is quickly preparing for the day when United States generosity may end. There is, therefore, a six-year economic plan and a rearmament plan under consideration. . . . *Manchester Guardian*, 13/5/55.

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Mr. Malik, Russian Ambassador to London, who on Saturday went to the British Industries Fair at Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, said at a luncheon there that . . . the economies of Britain and Russia were supplementary to each other, and there were substantial possibilities for an increase in trade between them. The Soviet Union could place in Britain substantial orders for ships, equipment and consumer goods. But to make trade normal, it was necessary to lessen international tension by way of negotiations on a policy of peace and not on a policy of force.

Manchester Guardian, 9/5/55.

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Very rightly, the B.B.C. takes extreme pains to remain detached and impartial during a general election campaign. It has a monopoly over the most powerful existing means of making or breaking reputations, yet it is bound by its charter to be strictly non-party and non-partisan.

The Observer, 24/4/55.

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The record amount of £373 millions was advanced on mortgage by building societies last year, according to Mr. C. B. Crabbe, chief registrar of Friendly Societies, in a report published to-day. This was £74 millions more than last year; it was the first time that advances had exceeded £300 millions. Of the 352,000 advances made during the year 91 per cent. were for amounts of £2,000 or less. . . . There were at the end of 1954 1,879,000 borrowers who between them owed £1,574 millions.

Manchester Guardian, 16/5/55.

The Scientific Attitude and our D. of P.

Scientific method can broadly be divided into three main categories—that of classification and measurement, experimental research, and the laying down of particular and general statements usually known as scientific laws.

The problem confronting the scientist, when examining a particular system of phenomena, is so to arrange his observational methods that the system he is examining is isolated as much as possible from the immediate environment. For example, consider the difficulty of weighing in grams to three places of decimals a quantity of some powder *e.g.*, chalk. On an open balance mere exposure to the atmosphere will result in the weight of the chalk fluctuating up and down as it acquires and gives off moisture from the air around it. The degree of isolation is not sufficient to complete the experiment. The chalk could be dried and contained in a vessel the material of which is less prone to take up moisture, the balance could be closed in or vacuumised, and so forth. In other words measures would have to be taken to render the environment as neutral as possible.

The whole method of scientific examination is concerned just with that—*isolation*, *i.e.*, rendering the environment neutral. Of course, absolute isolation is never attainable. It follows therefore that in the development of scientific knowledge no law or statement upon any system of phenomena can be the last word. For if isolation is never complete then there are casual agencies outside the system under examination. The process of "law-making" then, becomes one of ever-widening and more general statements; as more and more of the environment is taken into account, in the endless quest to render the system neutral.

For the scientific outlook it is axiomatic that our knowledge be regarded as relative and approximate. In every field of study, whether it be in the so-called exact sciences, in physics, chemistry, mathematics or in bio-chemistry, biology and so forth, no

theory has ever failed to undergo changes. Where theories appear superficially to occupy the same position of importance, closer examination reveals that what has changed is their applicability. That is, what was once used as a general theory is now applicable only as a special case. A simple example—Boyle's Law of gases describes the inverse ratio of pressure and volume at constant temperature. No such gas of course exists; and the behaviour of gases only approximates to this idealised statement, precisely because of the inability to neutralise the environment as far as temperature is concerned. Thus was the Gay-Lussac law required, which takes into account the variability of pressure, volume and temperature. Boyle's Law did not in consequence become wrong, but merely a special case of the more general law which followed it. Similarly Newtonian physics, with its conservation of mass, conservation of energy, its concepts of force and gravitation, has been supplanted by the principles of relativity physics. Again it is not that the former was wrong, but that it represents only a special case in a field in which the latter is a more general statement.

The history of all theory stands in this respect, and our D. of P. embodying as it does a statement of theory and guide to action cannot claim exemption. If we are to retain the claim of *scientific* socialists, we must organize to continually review our theory and as in other scientific fields research is necessary. The methods adopted for research in the natural sciences must inevitably involve methods which are unsuitable for social science. In the former not only are instruments used in which the limits of accuracy are known, and can be taken into account, but also the investigator is outside the material to be investigated. In social science however, no such conditions prevail. Precision measurement is not the general mode of estimation, and the investigator himself is part of the material to be studied. The investigator becomes to some extent his own measuring instrument. Thus in any large scale social research, unless some techniques of investigation are developed to discount the variability of the investigators, no reliable conclusions can be reached.

Accepting then the need for a continual questioning attitude towards our theory, the problem arises as to method. There are several useful methods widely used in many branches of science particularly applicable to social studies. One probably most convenient for our use is known as *anonymous group working*. In our case it would involve the circulation by branches of preliminary draft material to other branches, groups or individuals as desired, for comment and criticism. This may involve the production of a number of drafts before a final draft statement is prepared. During the course of this work, specialists in various fields could

be invited to attend. Although the investigating group would change its composition on the basis of branch attendance, success in the continuity of the work would depend on the regular attendance of a small core of members.

Experimentation being the practice in the research laboratory, it will be seen that repeated drafting functions as its substitute in any field where experimentation is not possible. As each draft is brought forward for the discussion, the errors and gaps serve as the material for the next period of work. A main drafting committee would be responsible for consolidating all the separate final branch drafts. From the consideration of this end-product of the research would emerge basic differences if any, which would become the subject for a successive large-scale investigation.

This method commends itself on two main counts. Giving as it does direction and canalization to social study, it has not the time-wasting disadvantages of discussion either as a series of Forum meetings at H.O., or in written form in the I.P.J. Secondly, anonymity avoids the possibility of views being discounted or favoured on the basis of the status of a member of the party. Also, comparatively new and inexperienced members can contribute views which might otherwise tend to be disregarded. In this way bias can be off-set to a considerable degree.

We live in a world in which theory and practice must indissolubly be bound together. Thus to some critics of the D. of P. I would say that mere criticism is not enough. An alternative basis for organization must be found. Until the quantity of qualifying facts is sufficient to enable workable alterations in the D. of P. to be effected, then it must still remain as our guide to action. On the other hand, this does not mean that those members who frequently rush to the defence of the D. of P. with the pleas—"absolute truth", "unqualified acceptance", "inviolate," etc., can settle more comfortably in their chairs. Unless we can get rid of this *religious dogmatism*, the party will certainly not survive as an organization claiming with some degree of truth to be scientific. The failure of such members to face up to the implications of the scientific attitude can mean little else than intellectual cowardice.

RAY BOTT.

Contributions to "Forum" should be addressed to the Internal Party Journal Committee, at Head Office. If they cannot be typed, articles should be written in ink on one side of the paper only, and contributors are asked to give their addresses and the names of their Branches. Contributors intending series of articles should give an indication of the scope of their series, not send merely a first article.

Bound Volumes

of "FORUM" for 1954 will be available shortly at about 10s. Orders should be sent to the Literature Secretary at the Party's Head Office.